

## Not My Gospel

Brian Carroll / General Adult

Unashamed: Paul's Magnum Opus / Romans 1:1-7

The very first line of Paul's letter to the Romans reminds us that the message we preach and believe does not originate with us, but with God Himself. Paul presents himself not as an author, but as a servant and messenger, delivering what has been entrusted to him. That means the gospel isn't ours to edit, soften, or reshape to fit our preferences. It is God's truth, carrying God's authority, and calling us to submit to it rather than stand over it.

### Introduction

- I need you to do me a big favor.
  - On the back of that connect card you've got, go ahead and write your "go-to" Starbucks order.
  - If you don't order Starbucks, tell me what establishment you would go to get a favorite beverage (remember this is a Baptist Church, so we'll be judging you if you put anything naughty) and tell us what your go-to choice would be.
  - For me, if we go to Swig, I always order a "Spring Fling" with Dr. Pepper Zero.
  - It's crazy just how "custom" everything has become.
  - I learned this week that when you multiply all of the options at Starbucks together, you've potentially got well over 100,000 drink options.
  - It's like...

You walk in for a coffee and it's not that simple

Menu on the wall and it's looking like a riddle

Hot or iced or blended, cold brew, nitro, free-for-all

Frappuccino on the menu and it's got you in its thrall

Tall, grande, venti, trenta —pick a size and pray  
Whole milk, two percent, oat, almond, soy, nonfat —  
No way Coconut — you're second-guessing every cup  
You just wanted coffee and now you're giving up.  
Single shot, double shot, triple shot, long shot  
Ristretto, upside down— wait, is this a coffee shop?  
Extra hot, light ice, foam or no foam  
Trying to remember why you ever left home  
Caramel, vanilla, hazelnut, mocha  
New flavor drops made you change your order  
Half sweet, extra pumps, sugar-free or not  
Every single option more than you can handle  
Whipped cream, no whip, cold foam poured slow  
Barista scribbles something only they would know  
Calls out a name — close enough, you take the cup  
One sip in and realize they mixed somebody's order up

- And somewhere in the middle of all that, you realize you didn't order coffee.
- You built it.
- Believe it or not, Starbucks' options pale in comparison to something else that you've undoubtedly encountered if you've eaten at a restaurant in the last 10 years.
  - Enter the Coke Freestyle Machine
  - A typical Coca-Cola Freestyle machine offers:
    - 165+ base drink options (Coke, Sprite, Fanta, Minute Maid, etc.)

- 100+ flavor combinations right out of the box
- But here's where it gets wild...
  - Because you can mix flavors, combine bases, and tweak combinations...
  - The number of possible drinks isn't just "a lot."
  - It's astronomical.
- One estimate (based on combining options) puts it at:
  - $\sim 4.6 \times 10^{49}$  possible combinations
  - That's a 4 followed by 49 zeros.
  - No wonder people stare at those machines like a confused golden retriever.
- Starbucks allows you to customize your drink.
- The freestyle machine encourages you to go ahead and build your own universe.
- But that's the world that we live in.
  - We don't just have options anymore. We have near infinite options.
  - And that's the cultural air we breathe.
    - Infinite customization
    - Infinite personalization
    - Infinite control
  - So when we get to the Gospel, we don't want to receive it as it is - we assume that there must be options.
  - We've been trained to believe that there's always another version, another mix, another way to make it us.
  - And when we open the book of Romans, we meet the Apostle Paul telling us, "Nope. It's one gospel. And it's not your Gospel to remix."

- We're kicking off a brand new series through the book of Romans today.
  - How long will it take?
  - I'm not quite sure yet (I'll tell you that there are five Sunday's in May and we won't be out of chapter 1 yet.)
  - Some people like to say that Romans is Paul's *magnum opus* - his greatest work.
  - But as we will see in these opening verses, Paul would correct that thinking.
  - This isn't Paul's masterpiece...instead it is Paul's clearest window into *God's* masterpiece.
- So let's jump in and get to work!

### **Scripture Reading**

#### **Romans 1:1-7 ESV**

<sup>1</sup> Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,

<sup>2</sup> which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures,

<sup>3</sup> concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh

<sup>4</sup> and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord,

<sup>5</sup> through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations,

<sup>6</sup> including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,

<sup>7</sup> To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

- I once had a church secretary who loved to tell stories.

- You couldn't ask her a question and get a simple answer.
- Her husband used to say that she would build a clock to tell you what time it was.
- I always think about that when starting a new sermon series because I don't want to take too much time telling you the things that you can find in a good study bible.
- However, there are some things that you need to know.
  - When Paul writes Romans, he's doing something unusual in terms of his letter-writing efforts.
  - He's writing to a church that he didn't start.
  - He's writing to a church he hasn't visited yet.
  - And he's writing to a group of believers that don't have a lot of personal connections.
  - That's why you read Romans and feel like it is very thorough.
  - He's not really writing to fix problems, he's writing because he wants to lay out the Gospel clearly.
- That's why Romans isn't just another letter.
  - He's introducing himself.
  - But more than, "Hi, I'm Paul."
  - This is "Hi, I'm Paul. And this is what I believe to be foundational."
  - It was written near the end of this third missionary journey - sometime in 57 or 58.
  - He's been a Christian for about 25 years and has seen a LOT.
  - But also keep in mind, Paul wasn't some ignorant schlub when he came to faith...he was highly trained in Old Testament theology.
  - So in some ways, Paul had spent his entire life getting ready to write this incredible letter.

- And that's why Romans is the theological treatise it is.
- We see it in this opening section.
  - All seven of these verses make up one very long sentence.
    - For you grammar nerds, here's the sentence diagrammed.
    - Before you get too picky, Paul never actually writes an explicit verb.
    - It is implied in the subject.
  - Paul writes this as one long sentence—because apparently he can't even say 'hello' without preaching first.
- And right out of the gate, it thunders into our lives calling us to evaluate our understanding of the Gospel.
  - And the first thing that Paul teaches us in the book of Romans is this:

#### **The Gospel Has a Source (vv. 1–2)**

- Many of you know Ms. Betty - she was our long-time custodian here at the church before retiring a couple of years ago...and I'm just going to say that Betty has some stories to tell.
  - It turns out that cleaning up behind a bunch of sinners isn't as boring as you might think.
  - I told her before she retired that we needed to write the book.
  - I volunteered to be her Ghost Writer.
  - **I've already got the title, *The Stains I've Seen (and the Ones We Pretend Aren't There)***
  - If we wrote that, we'd hit the NYT in no time.
  - But here's the deal...those are her stories to tell. Not mine.
  - And even if I were her ghost writer, they still wouldn't be mine.
- And that's exactly how Paul opens the book of Romans.

- He's writing it, but he needs to remove any illusion that this is his story.
- Just consider the language he uses to describe himself.
- Immediately - he's a servant of Christ Jesus.
  - That's a powerful word in the New Testament.
  - The word is literally the word for a slave.
  - And it is one of Paul's favorite designations for himself.
  - But this isn't just a formal, catchy way of introducing himself.
  - It reflected Paul's understanding of his radical submission to Christ's lordship.
  - It describes someone who is legally owned by another whose entire livelihood and purpose is determined by their master.
  - There is nothing about Paul that is going rogue.
- He's called to be an apostle
  - That's a very specific title reserved for a specific group of people.
  - It points to those individuals who were commissioned directly by Jesus to speak on his behalf.
  - That's a very small club.
- And he is set apart.
  - This means he is assigned a particular purpose.
  - In this case, he tells us what that purpose is.
- He is set apart for the Gospel of God.
  - Whose Gospel?
  - Not Paul's Gospel.
  - Not the Church's Gospel.

- Not your Gospel.
- Not my Gospel.
- This Gospel comes from God. The gospel has a source.
- This is important - Paul doesn't just say it, he brings the receipts.
  - Remember - he's a highly trained scholar in Old Testament theology.
  - And guess what this highly trained scholar notes about God's Gospel?
  - It was promised beforehand.
    - God's Gospel isn't plan B or C.
    - It's been in place from the beginning.
    - The prophets knew something better was coming and they wrote it down.
- What does this mean?
  - This isn't new.
  - This isn't trendy.
  - This isn't something Paul came up with to build a following.
  - And maybe most offensive of all to us, it doesn't come with options.
    - And let's be honest - that just kills our modern vibe.
    - We love the idea of the Gospel, but surely we can do better.
    - So we just...adjust it.
    - We keep the parts we like.
    - We soften the parts we don't.
    - We emphasize what makes us feel good, and ignore what confronts us.
    - Once you do all that, you might feel good about what you've made - but one thing is for sure, you no longer have the Gospel.

- The reality for us today is this - you can customize your coffee, but you can't customize the Gospel.
- Because the Gospel...

### **The Gospel has a Center (vv. 3-4)**

- The gospel is about a person — not a preference.
  - Sometimes, people like to treat the Gospel as if it is some kind of idea or philosophy.
  - That makes for interesting discussions and arguments.
  - And if it is an idea, or a philosophy, then it is much easier to simply add it to the buffet of religious ideas.
  - You'll hear people say this from time to time...
    - Jesus was a great moral teacher.
    - When Thomas Jefferson made his famous edits to the bible, he cut out most everything except for Jesus' teaching.
  - It isn't wrong to say that the Gospel influences ideas and philosophies.
    - It isn't wrong to say that the Gospel contains certain truths.
    - But it isn't first about ideas, it is first about a person and Paul quickly introduces us to this person.
- The Gospel concerns the Son of God.
- Paul immediately drops two absolutely massive truth claims.
- First, the Son of God is fully human.
  - Jesus was "descended from David according to the flesh."
    - Jesus isn't mythology - he's not the invention of history or the creation of paganism.
    - Jesus isn't symbolism - he isn't some dumb idol that points beyond itself.

- Jesus is a historical reality with clear anchors in history.
- You can see the bookends of this truth.
  - Nathan the prophet spoke to King David in [2 Samuel 7:16](#)

**2 Samuel 7:16 ESV**  
<sup>16</sup> And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.’ ”
  - Paul is saying here - That promise from Nathan? Yeah, that's Jesus.
  - And then in the Gospels, both Luke and Matthew record Jesus earthly genealogy taking him all the way back to David (and beyond).
- Jesus didn't just float into history.
  - He was born into it.
  - He had a real family tree.
  - He had a real hometown.
  - He had a real body that could (and would) bleed.
  - And yes, he probably had awkward relatives you wouldn't want to invite over for dinner.
- But in one of the greatest mysteries of the Gospel, Jesus is also fully divine.
  - Paul says it this way, Jesus was “declared to be the Son of God in power...by the resurrection from the dead.”
  - This isn't saying that Jesus became the Son of God.
    - Although there have been many heretics in church history who tried to teach this.
    - Paul is saying that the resurrection revealed Him as the Son of God in power.
      - He was Vindicated

- He was Exalted
  - His identity was publically confirmed.
- At the beginning of Jesus' ministry, the father declared that Jesus was his son.
  - At the resurrection, we see more than just a spoken affirmation.
  - We see the truth, displayed fully in an empty tomb.
- Jesus was more than a teacher.
- He was more than a philosopher.
- Jesus was not simply one option among many.
- Jesus is THE Son.
- Since the Gospel centers on a real person, this means you don't get to reshape the gospel—because you don't get to reshape Jesus.
  - You don't get to edit Jesus
  - You don't get to soften Jesus
  - You don't get to reduce Jesus.
  - You don't get to take his teaching and leave his authority.
  - You don't get to admire him without submitting to him.
- If the Gospel is only an idea, then you can debate it.
  - But since the Gospel centers on a person, you either have to bow to him in submission, or stand against him in rebellion.
  - There are no other options.
- And let's remember that there is a reason for this - it's not just for us to hone our debating skills.
  - We see very quickly that the gospel doesn't exist for our comfort, it exists for his glory.

## **The Gospel has a Purpose (vv. 5-7)**

- He spends the last three verses of this introduction outlining the incredible purposes contained in the Gospel.
- What God Gives
  - God gives grace and apostleship.
  - The first part is easy - grace.
    - That's the unmerited favor given to us by God.
    - We don't deserve it. We can't earn it.
    - It isn't by our worth or by our works.
  - The second part is a little more challenging.
    - Apostleship isn't pointing to all of us - it's pointing specifically to the call upon Paul's life and the other apostles.
    - God has given them a particular calling in light of this revelation of the Gospel.
    - For Paul, apostleship means that he has a particular role in the Great Commission.
- We have received grace, but we haven't received apostleship.
  - That doesn't mean we ignore this.
  - Though we don't share his office, we do share his assignment.
  - We are responsible for the Gospel in our generation.
- What God Demands
  - God is looking to bring about obedience of faith.
    - Isn't that the heartbeat of the Great Commission.
    - Making disciples, "teaching them to obey."
    - Even in that we see that the notion of a custom Christian faith is off the table.

- You can't customize it AND be obedient to it at the same time.
- There's a key qualifier here - this isn't just blind obedience.
  - This is obedience of faith.
  - This is obedience that is birthed out of belief.
  - So we're not talking about behavior modification.
  - The Gospel isn't "behave so you get into heaven."
  - The Gospel is so much more than that.
- I fear that we have too long preached a gospel that has focused more on changing behavior and less on changing hearts.
  - The Gospel absolutely results in behavior change, but it doesn't start with it.
  - It starts with a heart that is redeemed.
  - But the reality is this - you can't customize the Gospel and obey it at the same time.
  - For you need to understand - even though the Gospel is for you, it isn't about you.
- What are God's Aims
  - Paul says it clearly - for the sake of his name.
    - The Gospel isn't your life improvement plan.
    - It's not about your customized spirituality.
    - It is about God's glory - it is FOR the sake of HIS name.
  - There's a reason Paul said that the Gospel is foolishness to those who are perishing in [1 Cor. 1:18](#).
  - It flies in the face of all the lies we've been told.
    - There's a beautiful modern hymn that expresses this so profoundly.
    - The line repeats throughout the song...

- Then my eyes are lifted upward For His glory and my good
- For I know that He is working For his glory and my Good.
- For I know His glory is my good.
- You see, we've been trained to believe that our good is the highest goal.
  - We work toward our good.
  - But the Gospel flips that.
  - Your glory is NOT your good.
  - God's glory is.
- And in the Gospel, we see the Glory of God on fully display.
  - Finally, Paul tells us who this message is for
- Who it includes
  - Among all the nations, including you
  - The Gospel doesn't know boundaries.
    - It doesn't change based on geography.
    - This is important.
    - No cultural edits. This means that there are no "regional remixes."
  - There are certain parts of the world you can visit today where there are very customized versions of Christianity.
    - There are fancy seminary words for this, but basically it's what happens when people share the Gospel and aren't clear about the Gospel.
    - When we diminish the exclusive claims of the Gospel to gain converts rather than make disciples.
    - It's one of the saddest things to see - entire people groups that just add Jesus to their list.

- But let's not think we're immune to it either.
  - There's a southern, bible-belt version of this as well.
  - How many people in our area hold to a Gospel of adjacency?
  - There's no real life change, no real heart change.
  - But there's a clinging to the idea of the Christian faith without the transformation of the Christian faith.
  - There are LOTS of good people who are adjacent to the truth but haven't really allowed the crucified and resurrected Son of God to transform them.
  - We're surrounded by good people, religious people. People who are familiar with Jesus.
  - But the reality is that they remain unchanged by the power of the Gospel.
- And here's the truth that exudes from this profound introduction to the book of Romans...
  - The gospel gives grace.
  - It demands faith-filled obedience.
  - It aims at God's glory.
  - And it calls people from every nation—including you.
  - But at no point...does it ask for your input.
- But don't miss this - Paul does look at you and reminds you of how much God loves you and how much he wants for your good.
  - He says we are "called to be saints"
  - That's not platitudes...that's kindness.
  - And that's the Gospel - God's kindness to us shown us while we were yet sinners.

- And that's what we are going to see over and over again as we dig into this incredible treatise we call the Letter to the Romans.

### **Invitation**

- So let's bring this all the way back to where we started.
  - You walked in this morning thinking about coffee.
  - All the options.
  - All the combinations.
  - All the ways you can build something exactly the way you want it.
  - And somewhere along the way, we said it out loud:
  - You didn't order it...you built it.
- And the danger is we've gotten so used to living in a world like that that we start to assume everything works that way.
  - Even the gospel.
  - So we tweak it.
  - We soften it.
  - We adjust it.
  - We keep the parts we like.
  - We ignore the parts that confront us.
  - And we end up with something that feels right, but isn't real.
- And Paul steps into that mindset in [Romans 1](#) and says:
  - No.
  - This isn't your gospel.
    - It has a source—and it's God, not you.
    - It has a center—and it's Christ, not your preferences.

- It has a purpose—and it's His glory, not your comfort.
- Which means this leaves every one of us with a decision.
  - Not a customization.
  - A decision.
  - Because if the gospel were just an idea, you could debate it.
  - But it's not.
  - It's a person.
  - And when you are confronted with a person like Jesus—crucified, resurrected, reigning—you don't get to tweak Him.
  - You either bow to Him...or you walk away from Him.
  - There's no middle ground.
  - There's no "version" of Jesus that fits better for you.
- And here's the grace in all of this...
  - This same gospel that confronts you is the same gospel that calls you.
  - Paul says, "including you."
  - Loved by God. Called to belong to Jesus Christ.
    - That's not distant.
    - That's not abstract.
    - That's personal.
- So the question isn't:
  - "What version of the gospel do I prefer?"
  - The question is: "Will I receive the gospel as it is?"
  - Will you stop trying to build it and finally bow to it?
  - Will you stop standing over it as a critic and come under it as a sinner in need of grace?

- Because the truth is—you don't need a customized gospel.
- You need a true one.
- And the good news is that's exactly what God has given you.